

## Academic Integrity - Four Vignettes<sup>1</sup>

### A. Another Einstein?

Things have been really going well with your small seminar class. There are several articulate students contributing on important issues. So, you were anticipating reading a few nice papers this weekend in response to the writing assignment you gave. Sure enough, some of the students really worked hard on the assignment and produced strong essays. And, as usual, there were a few papers that have left you disappointed -- one student misread the assignment, another provided nothing but unsubstantiated opinion.

But one paper really stood out. Either the student should be immediately given a doctorate and asked to teach next semester, or this paper is entirely plagiarized from a published source. It's not typical of many plagiarized papers that are composites of unreferenced sources, loosely hung together to address the assignment. This paper reads as only an edited publication could read. You're surprised to read the name of the paper's 'author.' It is a student who is a major in your discipline, and one who has been a leader in this class and others you've taught. In fact, this student is becoming known as one of the strongest students in your program. But, all that being the case, you still are not sure whether the student could possibly be capable of producing the essay that was turned in. You know that you'll have to deal with this by class on Tuesday. **Question: What will you do on Monday?**

### B. Just a quick question

It's office hours and a student comes by 'just for a quick question.' She says, "Dr. Durand, I just want to tell you that I really learned a lot in your class last semester even though I only got a 'B'." You say, "Well, grades are not the only important thing," and you go on to tell her an anecdote about a 'B' you got in graduate school from one of your best professors. She says, "Yeah, well, I could have gotten an 'A' like all the rest of the people you gave an 'A' to who cheated on every exam and laughed about it afterwards for the rest of us to hear. They've got a system going that lets them party all weekend. You should do something about how you give your tests, because I need good grades too and... I don't want to seem like a complainer but...your class wasn't ... I guess I don't think my grade was really fair. Now I'm in another class with these same people. I hate this. If you faculty don't do something, then you are just as responsible as those cheaters are." **Question: What are your next moves?**

### C. Protecting the Standards

It's a Wednesday afternoon and you have a new stack of papers to grade that will take you hours and hours. But first there's a marathon three-hour department meeting to survive; so the grading will have to wait. The unexpected topic on the department's agenda is a proposed new

---

<sup>1</sup>All characters, situations, and stories described here are fictional. No reference to actual persons, events, or institutions is intended or assumed. Drs. Peter and Noreen Facione developed and refined these hypothetical cases based on the experiences gained through their many decades of service as faculty, administrators, workshop presenters, and leadership consultants to colleges and universities throughout the nation.

departmental policy to address the rash of cheating that has all the faculty concerned. The proposed policy calls for all courses to have at least one in-class objective examination that counts for a large portion of the grade. When the proposal is presented, your department colleague who authored the proposal claims, “I insist that my students demonstrate their own learning by showing it on tough in-class examinations, but there are those who never require this standard in their grading. Their students do take-home exams or group projects, and never have to really learn anything. When those students get to my class, they’re surprised that I won’t let them get away so easily. We need higher grading standards. Until then, we will not be able to put an end to the students’ expectations that they are going to skate through our courses without really proving themselves.”

You’re always annoyed by your colleague’s typical grandstanding and caustic rhetoric. Mostly people ignore his divisive remarks and simply move on. But this time he has knowingly or unknowingly vilified your teaching. You are one of those professors whose philosophy of teaching and learning has always been to make papers and take-home examinations so challenging that even if students worked together you wouldn’t mind. In your view, they would better achieve the course’s intended outcomes if they were to collaborate in analyzing the assignments and forming well reasoned responses. But more importantly you want to be sure that you are not encumbered by a policy that mandates any specific testing conditions. It is not that you have problems with objective testing per se. There are times when that form of testing makes the most sense. But as a policy applicable to all courses...you’re not sure. **Question: How can you and your colleague find a middle ground here?**

#### **D. The Data That Wasn’t the Data**

Dr. Carter settled in to one of the things she really enjoyed, the hours she dedicated to her research. She had received funding for this study because of its importance to community health and welfare, and last year’s data collection was exhausting but rewarding. Today was a day for analyzing the focus group data, something she was looking forward to now that her doctoral student assistant had completed the transcription of the audio tapes. As she began to read through the first transcribed group session, she realized immediately that something was very wrong. The transcription was entirely incorrect. It had participants saying things she knew they had never spoken in the focus group session itself. She knew this because this was one of the sessions she had conducted herself!

Quickly she assured herself that she was correct by listening to the beginning portions of the tape. She could feel her anger rising to immense proportions. How could her student have presented her with a false transcription? If she had discovered this data falsification only after these data had gotten mixed into the large community study, she would have to report this to the research director and to the federal agency. The integrity of the entire study would be in question. At the very least all data would need to be reanalyzed. Data contamination brings a research study to a halt! How could this student not understand the consequences of her failing to transcribe the tape with exactness as she had been taught? Why she herself had taught this student research ethics in the seminar last year. Hadn’t she? **Questions: What should she do about her data? What should she do about the doctoral student? Who does she have to talk to about all of this?**